Witness in Kennedy 'Plot' Says N.B.C. Tried to Wreck Inquiry

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NEW ORLEANS, June 20 (AP) — A witness in District Attorney Jim Garrison's investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy said today that members of a National Broadcasting Company news team had sought his help "to wreck the Garrison investigation."

At a news conference in Mr. Garrison's office, the witness, Perry R. Russo, said the N.B.C. team had alternated promises and threats to persuade him to appear on a television show last night about the Garrison investigation.

On the program, N.B.C. said, "Russo's answers to a series of questions indicate, in the language of the polygraph operator, 'deceptive-criteria.'" The network said Mr. Garrison knew this.

Leonard Gurvich, a private investigator, who said he supervised the test, said that Mr. Russo did not fail the test. He said the polygraph operator was unable to get specific readings because Mr. Russo "was highly nervous" during the two test attempts.

Clay L. Shaw, a retired New Orleans businessman, is under indictment on charges of conspiring to kill President Kennedy.

Mr. Russo, 25 years old, an insurance salesman, told a grand jury he had attended a party in September, 1963, at the home of David W. Ferrie, a former airline pilot. After the party, he said, he heard Mr. Ferrie, Lee Harvey Oswald and Mr. Shaw plot President Kennedy's death.

Mr. Ferrie and Oswald are now dead.

Mr. Russo said that Walter Sheridan of the N.B.C. news staff had offered to help him if he cooperated. He said:

"Sheridan offered to set me up in California, protect my job and guarantee that Garrison would never get me extradited back to Louisiana."

He said Mr. Sheridan had made the promises if he would "side with N.B.C. and the defense [of Mr. Shaw]."

Mr. Russo asserted that Richard Townley of WDSU-TV here and James Phelan of The Saturday Evening Post had also spoken to him on behalf of N.B.C.

He said Mr. Townley had told him the team had been "working closely with the defense" and had been trading information with Mr. Shaw's attorneys. He said Mr. Townley had threatened to wreck his reputation unless he cooperated.

"He said that Mr. Dymond [F. Irvin Dymond, a defense attorney] was going to tear me apart on the stand, and that after the trial was over I would be discredited in everyone's eyes," Mr. Russo said.

In New York, an N.B.C. spokesman said Mr. Townley had talked with Mr. Russo on several occasions. But he said Mr. Townley "denied telling him he was working closely with the defense or threatening to ruin Russo's reputation."

"Russo suggested to Townley that Townley should act as a go-between between Russo and the defense lawyers," the spokesman said. "Russo said if defense lawyers ask him the right questions at the trial, then he would voice his doubts about identifying Clay Shaw."

"This is the same man who told Townley it was now difficult for him to distinguish between reality and fantasy," the spokesman added.

He also said there was "absolutely no truth" to Mr. Russo's statements about Mr. Sheridan.

Mr. Russo said he was told by members of the N. B. C. team that both the network and the Central Intelligence Agency were "out to wreck the Garrison investigation."